

The University of Chicago

BLESSING AND CURSING IN THE PSALMS

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE
HUMANITIES IN CANDIDACY FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ORIENTAL LANGUAGES
AND LITERATURES

1934

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MORRIS GROSS

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The ultimate purpose of this investigation is, of course, to contribute to a more adequate understanding of the evolution of Hebrew religion. In pursuit of this aim it is desired to examine the blessing psalms as a possible clue. It is unnecessary to demonstrate further that the psalms here used had their origin in the dominant cultus since this has already been shown by Mowinckel and other Old Testament scholars.¹ But it is desirable to deal with the influence which the prophetic nonconformist elements exercised upon this particular phase of cult technique since in this way the ultimate aim of the study will be advanced.

In order to move toward these ends it will be best to begin by investigating these psalms in connection with those cultus ceremonies which featured the blessing technique, since, as will be shown, they were developed in the dominant cultus for use on such occasions as, for example, the feast of tabernacles.

The state of blessedness, according to Gunkel,² includes the satisfaction of all needs and the fulfilment of all purposes in life. It embraces all that man desires or might desire, such as peace, security, sustenance, riches, victory, protection against misfortune, and sickness. This is the state that is connoted by בִּלְטָה . Blessing, like cursing, has the quality of contagiousness. It can be communicated from the blessed to those who come in contact with them.³

¹Sigmund Mowinckel, Psalmen Studien (Kristiana: In Kommission bei Jacob Dybwad, 1923), Vol. III, Kulprophetie und prophetische Psalmen, pp. 2-3; Vol. V, Segen und Fluch in Kult Israel und Psalmen Dichtung, p. 3; see also on magic and cursing, chaps. i-iii of the complete dissertation entitled "The Relation of Blessing and Cursing in the Psalms to the Evolution of Hebrew Religion" (to be found only in the University of Chicago Libraries).

²Herman Gunkel, Einleitung in die Psalmen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933), p. 301.

³Johannes Hempel, "Die Israelitischen Anschauung von Segen und Fluch im Lichte altorientalischer Parallelen," Zeitschrift für Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft, neu Folge IV (1925), 21-30.

"The success of social intercourse depends on blessing. People must bless each other upon meeting. They enrich each other's power that way. . . . Even non-cultic assemblies must conclude with blessing."¹

The sort of blessing that the average ancient Hebrew sought is expressed in Psalm 128. It was security against oppression, famine, and general disaster, as well as many children and fertility in general, that was foremost in his mind. The well-being and the peace of Jerusalem and of Israel as a whole was considered the highest blessing. Thus the well-being of the nation was identified with that of the individual and vice versa.²

The writer of Malachi could think of no greater calamity than to say that the spring of blessing would be closed, or literally tied up (**וְאֵרִיתִי אֶת בְּרִכְתֵּיכֶם**, Mal. 2: 2). Blessing is a power that, as is suggested in Prov. 11: 25, tends toward automatic increase. It becomes a source of blessing for all those who ally themselves with its possessor, as is clear from such passages as Gen. 12: 3; 18: 18; 48: 20; Ruth 4: 11-12; Ps. 21: 7 ff.; Gen. 39: 2-7.³

Such representative and chronologically well distributed passages as Gen. 1: 28; 24: 60; 26: 24; 48: 19; Gen. 24: 27; 26: 12-14; Jer. 17: 7-9; Lev. 25: 21; Deut. 7: 12-17; 28: 1-8; Job 42: 12; Zech. 8: 12-14; Mal. 3: 10 f. will suffice to illustrate the fact that throughout Israel's history the root **בָּרַךְ** was used with a connotation of those physical blessings which flow from fecundity and material prosperity. This is not at all surprising when one realizes that in its origin the root **בָּרַךְ** goes back directly to the biological aspects of the mysterious process of procreation! Thus there are the Old Testament references to the effect that children are the offspring of and that they issue forth from the **בִּרְכִּיִּם**, Job 3: 12; Gen. 30: 3; 50: 23. These things impel one to sympathize with the more biological approach of Pederson who remarks that the term **בָּרַךְ** for blessing is derived from the use

¹Johs. Pederson, Israel--Its Life and Culture (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 201. See also I Sam. 13: 10; 25: 14; II Kings 10: 15-16; Gen. 24: 60; 47: 10; II Sam. 13: 25; 19: 40).

²Mowinckel, Psalmen Studien, V, 55-56.

³Those whose blessing was particularly effective were: the patriarch: Gen. 27: 27 ff.; 48: 9 ff.; 49: 28; seer: I Sam. 9: 13; the king: II Sam. 6: 18; I Kings 8: 14, 55 ff.; Ps. 72; and the priest: Lev. 9: 22; Numb. 6: 22 f.; I Sam. 2: 20; Gen. 14: 18-21; Deut. 10: 8; I Ch. 23: 13; Ps. 118: 26; 24: 5; 134: 3; 115: 12-15.

and application of the word in connection with fertility.¹ That is to say, the root בִּרְךְ for blessing is derived from בִּרְכָּן meaning the seat of reproductive power, the source of fertility and offspring.

"Beraka should then be connected with Berekh, knee, the latter having to be construed as a term for the abdominal region, the seat of the power of reproduction. So in Assyrian tarbit birkī-ia 'the seed of my knee', i.e. a son."²

Such an interpretation of בִּרְךְ makes the passages just cited exceedingly intelligible and meaningful. When Job interrogates "why have the knees (בִּרְכַּיִם) hastened to bring me forth," he refers to the seat of reproduction through which operates the power that is responsible for his coming into this world. Likewise the writer of Genesis (50: 23), speaking of those born on the knees of Joseph (בִּרְכֵי יוֹסֵף), is referring to the offspring whose origin he traces to its progenital source in Joseph.³

This is comparable to the passage in Genesis 46: 26, when, referring to the descent of Jacob, the writer uses the expression, יֵצְאוּ יִרְכֵן, literally "those who have come forth from the יִרְךְ (thigh)" of Jacob. This interpretation also holds true in the case of Rachel (Genesis 30: 3), who gives her maid servant to Jacob, stipulating that the children be considered as hers instead of Bilhah's. Thus Rachel, in saying וְהָלַךְ עַל בִּרְכֵי means that the offspring be counted to her, as though it had come forth from her own בִּרְכַּיִם.

From the use of בִּרְךְ in this connection it is legitimate to deduce that the ancient Hebrew understood it to connote the seat of the operations of that mysterious power which is the source of fertility and life.

¹Pederson, op. cit., p. 204.

²Ibid., p. 518.

³Bernard Stade, "Auf Jemandes Kniee gebären," ZAW, 1886, pp. 143 ff.; John Skinner, The International Critical Commentary A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1910), p. 386; and George B. Gray, ICC, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1921), p. 36, maintain that the latter passages refer instead to an age-old Oriental custom of placing the child upon birth in the father's lap as a formal sign of recognition that it belongs to him. Both the context and content of the Biblical passages in question render such interpretation unjustifiable.

This perhaps will explain the fact that Jacob had placed the sons of Joseph between his בְּרִיִּים in order to bless them.¹ Jacob did that because of the belief that the בְּרִיִּים was the seat of the great power of blessing, and he therefore desired to bring them in bodily contact with that power.²

It is also here that one finds an analogy between בָּרַךְ and בָּרַךְ. Thus, Abraham commands his servant Eliezer to put his hand under his בָּרַךְ and swear by Yahweh (Genesis 24: 2) that he will faithfully carry out his master's wishes. Thus the בָּרַךְ is the seat of the operation of that power.³

When the matter is so approached and when one remembers the inability of the early Hebrew to distinguish between the subjective and the objective, it is easy to see how the word בָּרַךְ came to connote not merely the result of the operation of the mysterious power or the place of its operation but also the power itself.⁴ This fact is borne out by the parallelism of בָּרַךְ and קָדַשׁ in Genesis 2: 3 and Exodus 20: 11. The use of קָדַשׁ in connection with Yahweh's blessing the Sabbath is indeed significant. It gives the Sabbath new meaning. It raises that day from a mere day of tabu and ill-omen,⁵ at which time one must be particularly careful not to arouse the deity's anger, to a day that is extremely lucky and favorable, a day that Yahweh has impregnated with his own קָדַשׁ substance. In a word the Sabbath has become a day that is charged with holiness and blessing.

But the parallelism of the two terms serves a double purpose here. It serves to explain a phase of בָּרַךְ which often is misunderstood, that is, the negative force of the term.⁶ Abimelech is afraid even to dare touch or harm Isaac because the latter is a בָּרַךְ יִחִידָה possessed with a power which, if aroused, may strike the offender.⁷ Such existence of a tabu aspect of the בָּרַךְ power

¹Gen. 48: 12.

²Pederson, op. cit., p. 201.

³Cf. Rashi, ad loc., who confirms this interpretation inasmuch as he relates בָּרַךְ to the genital organs. However, his later rationalization somewhat obscures the original force of the passage.

⁴Pederson, op. cit., p. 167; Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, III, 368.

⁵Sigmund Mowinkel, La Decalogue (Paris: Librairie Felix Alca, 1927), pp. 85 f.

⁶The belief in the dual power of beraka one still encounters in Modern Morocco; R. R. Marett, "Mana," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, VIII, 378.

⁷Gen. 26: 29.

is further suggested by the parallelism between it and קִרַּךְ which, it will be remembered, balefully affects those who defile it or take it lightly.¹ The object which contains that קִרַּךְ power, as the ark for instance, may serve as a source of blessing to one,² and a source of evil to another.³ From this understanding of the force of קִרַּךְ one might readily explain its use to mean cursing,⁴ without resorting to rationalization by assuming a euphemism.⁵ Another term which has similar antithetical connotations is קִלַּךְ . The negative quality of the latter term has been fully indicated by Mowinckel.⁶ However, it is desired here to point out the use of קִלַּךְ in the positive sense.⁷ Its use with this positive force, as a whole, has to do with the powers of procreation. The similarity to קִרַּךְ in this respect is worthy of notice. This discloses further the ancient Hebrew's tendency to tie up that mysterious power with the function of reproduction and with fertility in general.

Now how does the etymology of קִרַּךְ throw further light on this study? According to the Lexicons⁸ the root קִרַּךְ , as a verb, means either to kneel or to bless; as a substantive, either blessing or kneeling. On the basis of the similarity in the basic meaning and phonetic affinity of roots one is tempted to associate קִרַּךְ with קָרַךְ ⁹ or קָרַךְ in either of which the fundamental meaning is "to break." This tendency to intensify the consonantal

¹II Sam. 6: 6-9.

²II Sam. 6: 11.

³I Sam. 5: 1-12.

⁴I Kings 21: 10-13; Job 1: 5, 11; 2: 5, 9; Ps. 10: 3. It would be a mistake to assume that קִרַּךְ is the only term for cursing God. קָלַךְ as well as קָבַךְ is used in Lev. 24: 11-17; Ps. 37: 22; Isaiah 18: 21, etc.

⁵W. Gesenius and F. Buhl, Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament (Leipzig: Verlag F. C. W. Vogel, 1915), p. 117. See also Hempel, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-51, 91-92.

⁶Psalmen Studien, Vol. I, Awän und die individuellen Klagepsalmen, pp. 1-133.

⁷Gen. 49: 3; Job 40: 16; Deut. 21: 17; Isa. 40: 26; 29; Ps. 78: 51; 105: 36; and Hos. 12: 4.

⁸F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs (eds.), A Hebrew and English Lexicon (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1906), pp. 138-39; Gesenius-Buhl, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-18; Jewish Encyclopedia, ed. I. Singer (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1903), III, 243.

⁹Benjamin Davies, Hebrew and Chaldean Lexicon (Boston: A. I. Bradley & Co., 1879), pp. 105, 521, 523.

elements of a root, as in **נָרַךְ** and **נָרַק** for the purpose of expressing variation or modification of meaning, has, according to Hurwitz, long been recognized in Semitic philology.¹ Thus **נָזַז** "to shear" is flattened to **נָדַד** "to make an incision"; **קָצַע** "to hew down" is changed to **קָסַס** "to cut down," etc. But the idea "to break" in the word **נָרַךְ** is further evident from the verbal use of the root.² Thus **וַיִּנְרֹךְ עַל בִּרְכָיו** II Ch. 6: 13; **נִבְרַכְהוּ** "let us kneel," Ps. 95: 6, in the Qal, and in the Hiph. **וַיִּנְרֹךְ**, Eliezer causes the camel to kneel, literally "break the knees" Gen. 24: 11. Such interpretation of **נָרַךְ** would perhaps explain why the ancient Hebrew, when referring to the mysterious breaking forth of a spring, designated it as a **בִּרְכָה**.³

That the basic meaning of **נָרַךְ** is "to break forth" is further substantiated by the word **אָרַר**. This word arises out of the technique used in nullifying blessing and in time supplants the negative (cursing) force of **נָרַךְ**. But this word does not mean "to curse." It is rather the direct antonym of the basic meaning of **נָרַךְ**. If the following attempt to demonstrate this can be adjudged successful, then the claim made above that **נָרַךְ** originally meant "to break forth" will be further substantiated. Old Testament scholars have long recognized that the idea of "binding" is the underlying notion of the term **אָרַר** "to curse."⁴ Cheyne suggests that **אָרַר** is an antonym of **נָרַךְ**, inasmuch as the latter term at times means to "make progress," while **אָרַר** expresses the idea of binding or restraining progress. Such interpretation of **אָרַר** does not reveal the fundamental meaning of the term.⁵ An examination of **אָרַר** in its full context reveals a meaning far deeper than that given above, for it indicates its true quality as an antonym of **נָרַךְ** by showing that it means "to tie up" or "destroy" the seat of fertility and fructuation. This view of **אָרַר** is clearly expressed in Numb. 5: 11-31. The jealous husband has a way of satisfying his suspicions by taking the accused wife to the temple and by having her drink the bitter water prepared by the priest for the purpose of actually finding out whether she

¹S. F. H. Hurwitz, Root Determinations and Semitic Speech (New York: Columbia University Press, 1913), p. 30.

²Gesenius-Buhl, op. cit., p. 117.

³Is. 7: 3; Nah. 2: 9; Judges 1: 12-15; Josh. 15: 16-19; cf. K. H. Fahlgren, Sedaka (Upsala: Almqvist & Wick, 1932), pp. 162 f.

⁴T. K. Cheyne and J. S. Black (eds.), Encyclopedia Biblica (London: Macmillan Co., 1899), I, 591; also Brown, Driver and Briggs, op. cit., p. 26.

⁵Ibid.

is guilty or not. The potency of this מַאֲרִים water lies in the fact that if the woman is really guilty, it has the power to dry up and destroy the fertile organs in the adulterous woman (vss. 21, 22, 27). Thus her womb swells up and miscarriage results.¹ On the other hand, if she is truly innocent, the מַאֲרִים waters will have the opposite effect, which is exceeding fruitfulness (vs. 28). The use of אֵר in this connection is indeed illuminating. Likewise one finds when the Old Testament writer speaks of the earth ceasing to yield unto man its produce he describes it by saying that it has become אָרִיר (Genesis 3: 17; 4: 11). That is to say, this is a state where the productive forces of the earth become tied up and yield no more unto man, except at a price, the blessings contained therein. Such an explanation of אֵר makes its use in Malachi 2: 2 exceedingly significant. The threat there is that Yahweh will close up the store of blessing, that is to say, tie up the resources of productivity.

Likewise Jeremiah 17: 5-6, when, in describing the man that becomes אָרִר, the writer compares him to a scrub in the desert that dwells in the scorched lands of the wilderness in an uninhabited salt land (vs. 6). The opposite state, that is, the state of בָּרִיךְ, is on the other hand expressed by comparing the blessed individual to a tree planted by waters that sends out its roots to the stream, for its leaves remain green, nor does it languish in a year of drought, for it ceases not to bear fruit (vs. 8). Such interpretation of בָּרִיךְ is further substantiated by its use in connection with formal blessing and cursing in the cultus. It is apparent from Deut. 27: 9-14 that the pronouncement of blessing and cursing took place on the day of the consummation or renewal of the covenant of Yahweh with his people. It was on such occasions that blessings were attained.² It was on this day that the storehouses of blessing were opened and allowed to flow freely upon the members of the covenant group. However,

¹A. R. S. Kennedy, The Century Bible on Leviticus and Numbers (Edinburgh: T. C. & E. C. Jack, Ltd.), p. 219, reads מַאֲרִים from אֵר, i.e., the purpose of the curse is to bring the guilt of the adulterous woman to light. This interpretation is not in harmony with the general context. According to the context the writer seems to be speaking of the direct results of the מַאֲרִים water and not of the concomitant, or in other words, what effect this ordeal actually has on the adulterous woman, herself.

²Mowinckel, La Decalogue, pp. 141 ff.; also Psalmen Studien, V, 97 f.

if the Hebrews did not live up to the covenant the spring of blessing would be closed up, literally tied up, that is אָרֶר . Such is the threat that follows in verses 14-26 against those who will violate the covenant. A study of בָּרַךְ from this angle thus gives one an insight into what the ancient Hebrew thought of the power of blessing and explains why he laid so much stress on its attainment.

Now, since the nature of בָּרַךְ has been somewhat defined, the logical step immediately ahead is the determination of how it functioned. In other words, the next phase in this discussion is an examination of the blessing techniques.

While Gunkel recognizes the fact that blessing like cursing has its origin in the magical power of the spoken word,¹ he nevertheless feels that this cannot be traced in the root for blessing itself. An examination of the root בָּרַךְ has thus far proved this much that in it there inheres the idea that blessing is a power which bursts forth upon those who are eligible to receive it. This mana power connoted by בָּרַךְ is conceived as a concrete power which can be evoked through the spoken word (בָּרַךְ).²

In the ancient Orient as a whole and in Israel in particular, the effective power of the spoken blessing was used to ward off a curse.³ The curse was an instrument of the mischievous magician for bringing sickness and calamity upon the unfortunate victims.⁴ The power of the spoken blessing, however, was able to overcome it.

The great annual autumn festival, the feast of tabernacles, was a time when new blessing was secured⁵ as well as an occasion on which the source of blessing was replenished.⁶ Viewing it from this angle one understands why blessing Yahweh occupied such a

¹Gunkel, Einleitung in die Psalmen, pp. 293-94. See also A. Bertholet, Das Wesen der Magie (Aus den Nachrichten den Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen Geschäftliche Mitteilungen, 1926), p. 10; Mowinckel, Psalmen Studien, V, 131-32.

²Fahlgren, op. cit., p. 164; Pederson, op. cit., pp. 121, 122, 135, 136, 145; T. Wilton Davies, "Magic, Divination and Demonology amongst the Semites," AJSL, XIV (1898), 243, 246.

³Hempel, op. cit., pp. 106-7.

⁴A. Lods, ZAW, IV (Beihefte, 1925), 181-93; see also A. Causse, "L'ancienne poesie cultuelle d'Israel et les origines du Psaltier," Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses, VI (1926), 1-37.

⁵Mowinckel, Psalmen Studien, II, 19-35.

⁶Ibid., V, 13-20.

prominent position in the technique of the cultus.¹ According to Hempel the ancient Hebrew inherited from the Canaanites this concept that anyone who blessed the deity to increase its power thereby increases his own resources of blessing and power.² Mowinckel likewise points out that not only does the cultus induce blessing for the community through its rites and ceremonies, but it also aims to stimulate and increase the power of Yahweh for such purposes. In other words, the cultus is the instrument by which life and power are increased not only for man, but also for Yahweh. This idea one finds in practically all mystery religions. In the Psalms one finds it clearly illustrated in the parallel usage of the terms of כבוד and עוז (Ps. 29: 1). The giving of כבוד unto Yahweh here does not simply mean to pay tribute to him. It means to load him up with heaviness, soul power, soul content. Through that he receives עוז. In return Yahweh blesses Israel, with the blessing of עוז and שלום.³

Mowinckel, in his attempt to rediscover the purpose and technique of the cultus occasion, suggests that the writer of Ex. 12: 32 alludes to an annual cultus feast at which it was sought to attain blessing. According to the narrative, the Hebrews had requested Pharaoh to let them go to the desert to celebrate their feast. In which he continually refused but was finally compelled to grant. Upon their departure, however, Pharaoh had requested that at the celebration of this feast they should also procure blessing for him and his stricken country, so that the effect of the plagues might be removed from his ill-fated land. His request was וברכנוי גם אחי, that is, while they attained blessing for themselves they were also to include him in it. This episode, according to Mowinckel, as will later appear, reflects the technique of attaining blessing through the spoken word at the sacrificial rites conducted on such a cultus occasion. In this connection it is interesting to note I Sam. 9: 12, 13, where the חזן Samuel, who on this occasion seems to function in a somewhat priestly capacity, impregnates the sacrificial animal with blessing virtue through his blessing of it.⁴ The refusal of the people to eat the חזן until it had been blessed by the holy man suggests the importance of the act of blessing. Without the blessing the animal possessed no more "power" than any other

¹Ibid., p. 27; see also Pederson, op. cit., p. 204.

²Op. cit., pp. 87-95.

³Mowinckel, Psalmen Studien, V, 27-28.

⁴Shalom Spiegel, "A Prophetic Attestation of the Decalogue, Hosea 6: 5," Harvard Theological Review, April, 1934, p. 120.

ordinary slaughtered beast. Thus, blessing was significant because it charged with power the sacrificial animal and thus enabled the people, by eating it, to impregnate themselves with this power.¹ It was the blessing that gave it that peculiar power for the control of the environment which the people sought.

The idea of charging the object from which power is to be derived by blessing it, is also found in the Talmud.² At the end of the Tabernacles feast the participants circle the altar seven times. Then they decorate it with green branches and pronounce the words, יְיָ לְךָ חֵן "beauty unto thee O Altar." Mowinckel makes it clear that this is not an attribution of aesthetic value to the altar. The expression had a specific cult purpose. The branches were symbolic of strength and fertility. This power residing in the branches is transferred to the altar and is so communicated to the offerings offered thereon thus in turn making the sacrifices offered for the people more potent in blessing. The expression referred to is, therefore, the cult blessing that "charges" the מִזְבֵּחַ with this great power.³ A biblical passage in which חֵן seems to have such a technical meaning is found in Ezekiel 28: 7, חֵן חֵכְמָה the beauty of your wisdom, that is your חֵן achieved through חֵכְמָה. Beauty in the mind of primitive man wasn't just something pleasing to the eye; it was something that was good and useful. It required חֵכְמָה wisdom to attain such quality.

One encounters the same thing in the expression לְבַתֵּן קִדְשׁ of Ps. 93: 5. The Psalmist there does not refer to sheer aesthetic beauty. It is a statement of fact on the part of the participants in the annual Throne Elevation Feast. After the renewal, rededication, and cleansing of the House for Yahweh's ascension, the house itself becomes imbued with the קִדְשׁ quality

¹Cf. Marett, *op. cit.*, where he shows how the modern Moroccan believes that the beraka fills the sacrificial animal with the mana power, from which flows the blessing of fertility and power upon those partaking of the feast.

²Der Babylonische Talmud, Vol. III (on Sukkah, sec. iv), trans. Lazarus Goldsmidt (Berlin: Calvary & Co., 1899), p. 124.

³As to the extent of the physical effect of the blessing in charging the sacrament with power, Mowinckel mentions the Roman Catholic blessing of the Bread and Wine of the Mass. The Eucharist of the Lord's Supper, he cites as an example where the Catholic Church still depends on the blessing of the elements to effect the mysterious transubstantiation into the flesh and blood of Christ (Psalmen Studien, V, 25).

and is thereby attuned to the blessing process. It is in this sense that the term חֵסֶד should be understood here for a Psalm employed on such occasion surely would not concern itself with describing mere beauty of appearance. חֵסֶד here means power and blessing and this connotation is further established along the line suggested above by the fact that it stands in apposition to the term עֹז.¹

It was in the magic-like manner of the cult rites and ceremonies that the ancient Hebrew proceeded on the occasion of the great cult feast to secure blessing.² The practice of "charging" the altar with that mana power by blessing it or by performing some special rite usually took place at the time of procession in which the festival culminated.³ Clear evidence of this fact may be detected in Ps. 118, a procession liturgy⁴ used in connection with the feast of Tabernacles.⁵ This Psalm is a combination of blessing and thanksgiving. It is antiphonal in form consisting of request and response, carried on between the leader of the procession and the clergy. Thus, when the procession reaches the temple gates the processional leader requests that the gates be opened for the procession (vs. 19). The gate keepers open the gates and invite the entrance of the procession (vs. 20). The song of the procession as they enter the Temple (vss. 21-24). Then comes the request for blessing (vs. 25): "O Lord help us. O lord give us success." To this the priestly chorus replies (vs. 26): "Blessed be he who enters in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord." Finally, the procession ends with the circling of the altar at which time they repeat the following (vs. 27): "Yahweh is the God of our fortune. He makes light for us in darkness. Close-up the procession with branches unto the corners of the Altar." The ritual finally closed with an expression of thanks, quite in harmony with the whole ceremony (vss. 28, 29).⁶

¹Mowinckel, Psalmen Studien, V, 24-27.

²Mowinckel, La Decalogue, pp. 121 ff.

³Mowinckel, Psalmen Studien, V, 34 ff. Contra see O. Quell, Das Kulturelle Problem der Psalmen (Berlin: D. Kohlhammer, 1926), p. 558; also Paul Volz, Das Neujahrsfest Yahwehs (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1912), pp. 6, 56 ff.

⁴Hans Schmidt, "Erklärung des 118 Psalms," ZAW, XL (1922), 1-14.

⁵Mowinckel, Psalmen Studien, V, 34; Spiegel, op. cit., pp. 120-31.

⁶Mowinckel, Psalmen Studien, V, 34.

Even a cursory examination of this Psalm would tend to convince one that the tradition of circling the altar at the close of the procession during which green branches were placed on its corners, did not originate in Talmudical times. In fact this practice was not only pre-Rabbinic but had its roots in the cult of early Canaan itself.¹ The use of green branches, among which were palm branches, on the occasion of the procession at the feast of Tabernacles is described in Lev. 23: 40.² Ps. 116: 27 as was seen above, gives a vivid picture of how these branches were employed to increase the power of the בְּרָכָה and thereby multiply the source of blessing.³ It is the performance of rites such as these that prompt the priestly chorus to raise their hands in response and pronounce their blessing "in the name of Yahweh."⁴ It is the mighty name of Yahweh ultimately that procures the blessing.⁵ The knowing of the name is just as important in the pronouncing of a blessing as in the pronouncing of a curse.⁶ He who knows the name is master over the super-human forces. It is thus natural that one finds the expressions בְּרוּךְ לַיהוָה וְשֵׁם יְהוָה so prominently used⁷ in connection with blessing.

Now after one has discovered the nature and use of the procession Psalms in the cult, amongst which are included Ps. 115; 120-134;⁸ 15; and 24,⁹ one might want to ask at this point, what is the idea back of the whole practice of blessing? Simply this, that one may secure the desired blessing by employing the proper liturgy, by performing the prescribed rites and by complying with the cult ordinances in general. These rites and ordinances on the whole are magical in nature, and very little different,

¹Ibid., p. 26; II, 105. See also Rudolph Kittel, Religion des Volkes Israel (Leipzig: Quelle and Meyer, 1921), pp. 94 ff. Contra see Quell, op. cit., pp. 111-13.

²On the palm as the tree of life, cf. G. A. Barton, Semitic and Hamitic Origins (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1934), p. 142.

³Mowinckel, Psalmen Studien, V, 25 ff.

⁴Ps. 118: 26; 134: 1-3; and 115: 12-15.

⁵Gunkel, op. cit., p. 300.

⁶Cf. F. J. Coffin, The Third Commandment (Norwood, Mass.: The Norwood Press, 1898).

⁷Ps. 118: 26; Gen. 14: 19; Jud. 17: 2; I Sam. 15: 13; 23: 21; II Sam. 2: 5; Ruth 2: 20; 3: 10; 115: 15.

⁸See Mowinckel, Psalmen Studien, II, 4 ff.; IV, 3 f.

⁹Ibid., V, 123.

qualitatively, from the cult rites of the entire ancient orient.

The underlying idea, however, is entirely different in the processional Psalms, 15 and 24,¹ which register the stamp of prophetic influence.² There the attainment of blessing, one is informed, is not just contingent on the mere performing of a mechanical routine of antiphonal singing and cult ceremonies.³ Yahweh blesses Israel not just because they are his chosen ones.⁴ Here it is demanded that they fulfil the moral laws and precepts, if they are to be eligible for blessing.⁵ This fact is impressed upon the assembly both at entry and at exit.⁶ This was done so that they could not fail to remember that blessing did not automatically follow on the completion of the cultus rites. Its attainment, on the contrary, depended largely on their own individual conduct, in social relationships during the course of the entire year, and not just during the rites. Of course, one still had to come to the hill of Zion⁷ to receive his blessing. This simply indicates that while this Psalmist was imbued with moral idealism he had not given up the forms and symbols of the inherited cultus. He was a devotee of the cult.⁸ But this does not detract from the fact that this Psalmist nevertheless reflects the influence of a changing world view along with which goes a shifting of emphasis from the magical to the ethical technique for attaining blessing. This is not often recognized by scholars in their interpretation of Psalms 15 and 24. Those scholars who have recognized the moral emphasis in these Psalms⁹ have, to some degree,

¹There are other Psalms that stand out as critical of the usual cult rites and ceremonies, such as Ps. 40; 50: 8-13; 51: 18 ff., etc. However, it is necessary to confine the discussion here to Ps. 15 and 24 since the latter Psalms alone are couched in a form identical with the other cult procession Psalms and it is around the comparison of the form that this discussion centers.

²Cf. Rudolph Kittel, Die Psalmen (Leipzig: Deichert, 1914), pp. 45-50, 99-103; and W. Stark, Lyrik: Die Schriften des Alten Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1911), pp. 12-16.

³H. Gunkel, "An interpretation of Psalm 24," Biblical World, XXI (1903), 366-70. See also I. S. Slotki, Journal of Biblical Literature, LI (1932), 214-23.

⁴Mowinckel, Psalmen Studien, V, 134-35.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Spiegel, op. cit., pp. 128 ff.

⁷Ps. 15: 1; 24: 3. Cf. J. Morgenstern, Hebrew Union College Annual, VI (1929), 36 f.

⁸Mowinckel, Psalmen Studien, III, 17.

⁹Gunkel, Einleitung in die Psalmen, pp. 366 ff.; Hempel, op. cit., pp. 103-7; Mowinckel, Psalmen Studien, pp. 134-35, etc.

failed to appreciate the source of the influence behind this new trend.

Mowinckel, for example,¹ regards this influence as arising from within the cultus itself, believing that it was there from early times. He makes Moses and Samuel prototypes of the cultus prophet and believes that within this latter group there existed, from their times, forces which sufficed, of themselves, to bring about the phenomenon which is reflected in these ethical psalms.² Mowinckel, it should be pointed out, holds that the influence of non-guild prophets on the cultural evolution was negligible.

This viewpoint does not seem to accord with the facts of history. The most reliable evidence supports the dominance among the early Hebrews of the tendency to conform to the pattern of culture which prevailed in Canaan and which was conserved through the cultus.³ In looking for the source of the moral influence reflected in such Psalms, one must turn elsewhere than merely to organized religion. That system did not, morally speaking, lift itself up by its own boot straps.⁴ The lack of ethical and moral emphasis in the cult prior to the Deuteronomic reformation is too well known to need any further proof. It was not until the protesting and critical prophets stimulated others to a nonconformist attitude and later threw their full support to those within the system who worked for its ethicization that a new trend was imparted to the development of the cultus as a whole. As the result of the impact of their thought a new emphasis became prominent in the cultus, a moral and ethical emphasis. A somewhat different rationalization of the source of the ethical influence under

¹Psalmen Studien, V, 134-35. In Vol. III, pp. 17 ff., he makes the point that מַשְׁכֵּן דָּר of I Chron. 15: 22-27 does not refer to the one in charge of the cargo but rather the one instructing in prophecy. Contra see Gunkel, Einleitung in die Psalmen, pp. 372-74. In the above connection see also II Chron. 20: 14 ff.

²Mowinckel, Psalmen Studien, III, 9-30.

³For clear and concise statements on the extent to which the Hebrew immigrant assimilated Canaanite culture see J. M. P. Smith, Religious Thought in the Last Quarter Century, ed. C. B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927), pp. 15 ff., 20; Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, II, 291; W. R. Smith, Religion of the Semites (London: A. C. Black, Ltd., 1927), p. 113; J. Morgenstern, Jewish Quarterly Review, VIII (1918), 51 ff.; A. Lods, Israel (Paris, 1930), p. 118.

⁴Gunkel, Einleitung in die Psalmen, pp. 372-74.

discussion seems to be suggested in a recent article by Spiegel.¹ If one interprets aright the implications of his argument he agrees with Mowinckel in the view that the source of this influence lay within the cultus itself. He apparently differs somewhat with Mowinckel in that he appears to recognize more the ethical importance of the protestant prophets of the eighth century, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. His argument, however, is substantially to the effect that these men drew their stimulus from organized religion itself.

He supports this argument by a study of Hosea 6: 1-6 in which he calls attention to the prophets' use of cult forms.² He notes the same use of cult forms in Isa. 33: 14 ff. and Micah 6: and calls attention to the relationship in form and content between these passages and Psalms 15 and 24. In this way he succeeds in suggesting that these younger contemporaries of Hosea derived their ethical inspiration from the cultus. From this is but a short step to suggest the operation of the same influence on Hosea.

If this argument were valid the position taken in this dissertation could not stand and the study of blessing and cursing in the Psalms would yield no help toward the determination of the chronological relationships of the Psalms and their bearing on the evolution of Hebrew culture. But the argument of Spiegel appears to be a tour de force. In the first place Isa. 33: 14 ff. and Micah 6: 6 are, according to the consensus of critical opinion, not authentic utterances of these prophets.³ This being the case the argument begs the question.

Another objection to the argument is that Spiegel makes certain unwarranted assumptions on the basis of literary influence. He assumes, for example, that because Isa. 33: 14 ff. and Micah 6: 6 are cast in the question and answer formula that they necessarily depend directly on Psalms 15 and 24. However, there are several other cases of the use of the same formula in the Psalms which do not reveal this ethical influence. In fact it seems more than likely that this was a very ancient cultus formula

¹Op. cit., pp. 120 ff.

²Cf. W. C. Graham, The Prophets and Israel's Culture (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934), chap. iii; Herbert G. May, "Fertility Cult in Hosea," AJS, XLVIII (1931-32), 73-98; see also H. Gunkel, "An Interpretation of Psalm 24," Biblical World, XXI (1903), 367.

³J. Skinner, Isaiah I-XXXIX (Cambridge: University Press, 1915), p. 263; J. M. P. Smith, ICC on Micah (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1911), p. 124.

which Spiegel himself recognizes.¹ In this case literary relationship proves nothing with regard to ethical relationship.

Beyond all this one would be at a loss to understand the phenomenon of the magnificently fresh prophetic idealism if one were confined, in searching for the source, to the relatively very few Psalms which display a congruous spirit. It is true that Spiegel finds the source in the Torah which underlies these Psalms. But how could such an ethically advanced Torah have been officially recognized and enforced in the cultus and yet have exercised an almost negligible effect on the psalter as a whole. One must insist that the source of the more exalted moral insight of the prophets is to be sought in an actual cultural conflict, in a concrete struggle for justice and righteousness, and not in the forms or formulae of the accepted religion.

It is to be hoped that this study will have contributed something toward establishing the general position that the origin of the Psalms must be sought in the realm of the technique of the organized religion of Israel, a position which Mowinckel most convincingly champions. Further that it will have supported the view that the determination of the chronological relationships of the Psalms must be attempted not by endeavoring to relate them to the political side of Israel's history but to the cultural side of it.

It is also to be hoped that there has been herein suggested how the Psalms may be used as a seismometer for the detection of the tremors rising within the cultus from the social and cultural conflicts which developed when the dominant Canaanite-Hebrew pattern of culture began to disintegrate under the stress of Assyrian imperialism. What has been attempted here with the phenomena of blessing and cursing may also be attempted with other features of that pattern such, for example, as Messianism² and Holiness.³

¹Op. cit., p. 124.

²W. C. Graham, "Isaiah's Part in the Syrio-Ephraimitic Crisis," AJSL, L (1934), 201-16.

³W. I. Wolverton, "Eighth Century Prophets' Idea of Holiness" (Unpublished Doctor's dissertation, Department of Old Testament Literature and Interpretation, University of Chicago, 1934).

